

**Testimony of Krystal Rich, Graduate Student and Connecticut Resident
In Support of HB 5029, An Act Concerning Sexual Assault and Interpersonal Violence on
Campus**

Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, February 11th, 2014.

Senator Cassano, Representative Willis, and honorable members of the Committee, thank you for taking the time to address this important issue. My name is Krystal Rich and I am a current graduate student at the UConn School of Social Work, an alumnus of Central Connecticut State University and a survivor of sexual assault on a college campus. In 2012, I sat before you and testified in support of HB 5031 and today I am writing you again in support of the proposed changes in HB 5029, An Act Concerning Sexual Assault and Interpersonal Violence on Campus.

On February 18th, 2010 my life changed forever. I was sexually assaulted, emotionally tortured, stalked and harassed by my former professor and then Administrators at Central Connecticut State University. As terrifying as the assault was, what I had to go through for the following two years was even more traumatizing. At the time I was assaulted there was no policy to protect me, very little preventative education, no specific information regarding where to go or who to speak to, and no formal education or training required for faculty or staff. My assault also occurred off campus, making the investigation at the time much harder. Since then, there have been many strides made at Central Connecticut State University and across the state to develop, revise and implement policies and procedures that properly respond to victims of sexual assault, however more could be done and I am hopeful that this proposed legislation will aid universities across the state in doing so.

One item HB5029 addresses is the importance of allowing for anonymous reporting. As a survivor I understand how difficult it is to not only report the assault to authorities or administrations but also to disclose to even those closest to you. Reporting an assault is not just a matter of giving a statement and walking away, it means being questioned over and over again, being made to relive the horrific experience, and many times made to feel bad or shameful. In my case, there were several victims before me who chose not to report the crime because of the powerful position our perpetrator held at the University. Had there been anonymous reporting available, they could have utilized it and alerted the University to what was going on long before I became a victim. There are many reasons why a victim of sexual assault does not want to or cannot report the crime and she/he should not be made to feel bad or shameful about it. Allowing anonymous reporting will give people that chance to say something while keeping their anonymity.

An additional barrier to disclosing is that not all Institutions are clear on where victims can file a report and/or do not offer multiple locations where a report/disclosure can be made. Following my assault, I was bounced from department to department, not because of a lack of wanting to help me but simply because no one knew how. Requiring higher education institutions to provide clear and concise information to survivors will be helpful in stopping that from occurring to another survivor; however I also think it's imperative that each offers several reporting options where there is more than one designated person/office that can take a report of sexual assault or interpersonal violence. In my case, the person that I was supposed to report my assault to was, in

fact, my perpetrator. Having one office such as; Diversity and Equity, Student Conduct, Police Department or Human Resources may deter certain victims from reporting because of a conflict of interest, whether it be because they know someone in that office, they don't feel comfortable with the person/office, or have a similar situation to mine.

As a survivor and future social worker, I hope that while higher education institutions are required to implement prevention education, training, and awareness events based on this current legislation, that there will also be plans to require an evaluation of these practices. It is important not only that these trainings and awareness events happen, but that the correct message reaches all members of the various school communities and that students, faculty, and staff are satisfied with how the information is being disseminated. It would also be helpful for each Institution to assess whether their practices are culturally competent given that sexual and interpersonal violence may present differently across cultures. Although budget constraints are always of concern, these evaluations could be done utilizing minimal resources. Without asking the community if they are receiving the messages about ending sexual and interpersonal violence that their campus is dedicated to and where to go if they need help, we will never know if the practices put into place are in fact effective.

Sexual assault is not something that happens at one specific college or university, to a certain demographic, at a specific time or place, or by a specific type of person; sexual assault knows no boundaries. It is not an issue that can be fixed in one day and requires an entire climate shift; a shift that needs to be made by all members of our society. Passing this piece of legislation will be a giant leap in the right direction and will provide hope to all of those who have experienced sexual or interpersonal violence and the prevention of future victims.

Thank you for considering this important piece of legislation. I hope that you will join me in supporting HB 5029.

Krystal Rich
MSW Candidate
University of Connecticut School of Social Work
Krystal.rich@uconn.edu